



Putin Has a Vision and a Strategy, The West Seems to Have Neither

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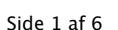
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April 17 is just another piece of evidence that this will not be the case. Putin's tactic is "two steps forward, and one step back". When he takes a step back, the west rejoices, but we should be very careful and watchful. For Putin is preparing the next steps. The Russian government will not invade, but destabilize. It is clear that a "new strategic reality" has dawned on the European region, to quote NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow.

This new strategic reality is a turning point. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, NATO is 'forced to consider Russia less of a partner and more of an adversary' Vershbow said.

Political and strategic leaders on both sides of the Atlantic must confront this immense change openly, eagerly and with sharp attention to consequences. In some ways what has happened with Russia is of larger importance than 9/11. The terrorist attacks, by non-state actors, despicable as they were, were the realization of a risk that was a known part of the security landscape after the Cold War. Russia, a state actor, has changed that security landscape by no longer respecting some of the most basic elements of the international order, the sanctity of borders and territorial integrity. This is a game changer. There can be no new reset (forget those buttons please) no return to an uneasy pretension that nothing had changed, like after the invasion in Georgia in 2008.

It is the states outside NATO that most clearly have felt the change, from Georgia to Ukraine. Here, aggressive propaganda efforts, the use of covert agents to foment unrest, overt threats about use of force, and diplomatic feints have been mixed with an opportunistic will to pursue territorial advances on the ground. But Russian efforts are not isolated to these states and areas. In an effort to regain lost status, thinking it is "better to be feared than to be loved", the Russian government is actively working to undermine Western unity through its bilateral relations with individual countries.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union actively supported political and civil society elements such as parts of the peace movement in Western Europe. It used covert actions to infiltrate the highest echelons of western elites. It used a huge propaganda machine to influence public and elite opinion. And while we have given up our institutions and means to inform the Russian public, carried away by the mesmerizing attraction of the internet and social media, we left the field to the Russians. In a scary echo of the Cold War, Russia is supporting ideological fellow travelers and sympathetic regimes once again.

This time, however, it is the nationalistic siren calls for a stop to European cooperation that Russia is seeking out. With patriotic zeal, chauvinistic nationalism and scant regard for minorities including gay rights the overlap between Putin's worldview and that of the hardline critics of the European Union is evident. He has infiltrated the governments and most importantly, the banks in Central Europe. In undermining European integration, Putin will strive to divide Europe first, make efforts to destabilize in order to optimize his influence. He will also continue to drive a wedge between the US and Europe.

On May 25, elections for the European Parliament will take place across Europe. Have no doubt, Putin is not just sitting idle and waiting for the results. He understands better than most European leaders what is at stake. One obvious question for the Western intelligence services will be how much and where Russia has been and will continue supporting the extreme right-wingers in both Central and Eastern as well as Western European members of the EU.

Putin has a vision and a strategy, the west seems to have neither.

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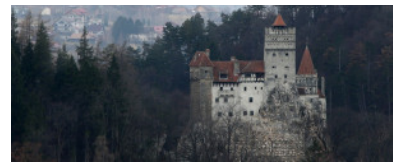
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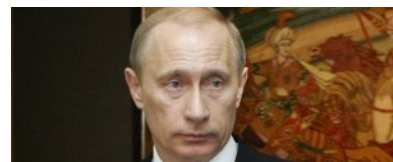
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